

# Pervasive intra-party conflicts in a democratising Nigeria: Terrains, implications, drivers and options for resolution

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## Abstract

Intra-party conflicts of all shapes and complexions have been part and parcel of Nigeria's democratic journey. However, in recent times, they have become much more pervasive and even assumed crisis dimensions, with negative implications for democratic stability and consolidation. Drawing from the literature and interpreting the evidence, this article examines the terrain, implications and drivers of intra-party conflicts in a democratising Nigeria with a view to recommending options for resolution. It proceeds from the premise that pervasive intra-party conflicts, which have now assumed crisis dimensions, are not given, but have been nurtured by certain structural factors which have shaped the contours of politics in Nigeria. Specifically, it argues that the crises are closely connected with the neo-patrimonial character of the Nigerian petro state, the nature of politics being played by the political actors, praetorian hangover, and the paucity of

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democrats who genuinely have democratic temperaments to play the game of democratic politics according to established rules. It calls for, among others, the reform and strengthening of the internal conflict management capacities of political parties in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** democracy, political parties, elections, intra-party conflicts, conflict management, Nigeria

## Introduction

As political organisations, made up of individuals with divergent opinions, values, interests, and also as platforms for recruiting personnel to occupy public offices, political parties cannot but be an arena of conflict arising from mutually exclusive views, thoughts and interests. Indeed, beyond being conveniently tagged, albeit theoretically, as the media for aggregating interests and opinions within a polity (Omotola 2010:125), political parties' personalities in liberal democracy are constantly shaped and reshaped by ever-recurring conflicts among the different actors within their folds. Put differently, conflict, in different shapes and dimensions, is part and parcel of the operational architectures of political parties in a liberal democracy.

While intra-party conflict the world over may emanate in different forms and sizes, the most debilitating, not only to democracy itself but to the society as a whole, are those arising over the selection of party leadership and candidates. Ideally, political parties are expected to put in place adequate institutional frameworks for mediating conflicts that may occasionally arise among their members (see Scarrow 2005). By institutionalising such frameworks, they do not only engender consensus building within their folds, but also contribute overtly to the stability of the entire system (Simbine 2015:5). In the words of Omotola (2010:12), 'if well-institutionalized, political parties can serve as a set of mediating institutions through which differences in ideas, interests, and perceptions of political problems at a given time can be managed'.

The foregoing ideal would appear to have been internalised and institutionalised in mature liberal democracies, where institutions

for regulating power contestations within political parties have been entrenched. But in a democratising Nigeria, as in most illiberal democracies, the opposite seems to be applicable (Basiru 2015:83). Since the country re-democratised itself in 1999, it may not be out of place to assert that political parties' records in the area of internal conflict management have not been disappointing (see Olaniyan 2009; Ojukwu and Olaifa 2011), but in the last few years, the lack of conflict management has resulted in unending intra-party wrangling, ceaseless litigations, wanton party defections, among other antimonies that are rare in liberal climes (see Omilusi 2013; Nwanegbo et al. 2014). Although the problem is not new, but has been manifested during the country's previous Republics, the dimension of the problem in the Fourth Republic is indeed alarming. This is evident from the acrimonies and crises that trailed the recently concluded primaries of major political parties across the country (Daka and Abuh 2018:1).

Against the backdrop of the foregoing and considering the crisis dimension that intra-party conflicts have assumed in recent times, it is thus imperative to interrogate the pervasiveness of intra-party conflicts in a democratising Nigeria. Although there has been a plethora of works on internal democracy within political parties in a democratising Nigeria, the sphere of intra-party conflicts and management would seem to have received scant attention. The significance of this article is therefore predicated on deepening the discourse in this area. Primarily, this article examines the terrain of intra-party conflicts in a democratising Nigeria and teases out the implications of its pervasiveness for democratic peace and stability. It also identifies and engages the drivers and factors responsible for the pervasiveness of intra-party conflict in a democratising Nigeria. It then concludes and suggests options for resolution.

## **Conceptual framework**

Though many descriptive terms in this area of study may be viewed as concepts and invite analysis, two are of central significance in this article: 'political party' and 'intra-party conflict'. In other words, what is

a political party? What constitutes intra-party conflict? However, it must be stressed that it is not an easy task to define them, as the two concepts are essentially contested (Gallie 1962:170). As regards the former, it has been conceptualised in various ways by scholars. To Sartori (1976:63), a political party is 'any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections candidates for public office'. In their contribution to the literature, Lapalombara and Anderson (2001:143) view a political party as 'any political group, in possession of an official label and a formal organisation that links center to locality, that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free) candidates for public offices'. Elsewhere, Ikelegbe and Osumah (2008:34) see a political party as a voluntary association, organised by persons bound by common interests, which seeks to acquire or retain power through the election of its candidates into public office.

What could be gleaned from the foregoing is that a political party is an entity made up of people whose aim is to translate the agenda that unites them into policy-based actions after gaining political power via the electoral process. Therefore, a political party is distinguished conceptually from other democratic institutions by the numerous functions it dispenses in a democracy. Agbaje (1999) has broadly categorised these into three, viz: electorate-related functions, government-related functions and linkage-related functions. However, it has to be stressed that, in the case of members struggling for power, the dispensation of these functions is not given but rather depends on how well a political party has institutionalised its internal mechanisms for resolving conflicts. The point here is that a political party should have internal mechanisms for managing conflicts arising among its members. Assessed against the background of the foregoing, therefore, where do we place political parties in Nigeria? We will come to this shortly, but before then, it is germane and imperative to first engage the concept of conflict and then its subset, intra-party conflict.

Suffice it to aver that the concept of conflict, in spite of its ubiquitous use in the fields of Peace Studies, cannot be pinned down to one specific definition. Indeed, as Ezirim (2010:38) remarks, it has many definitions

which all point to the same thing. To this end, it has been defined by theorists from different standpoints. Thus, for Coser (1956:8), 'conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals'. Elsewhere, Tjosvold and Van de Vliert (1994:304) perceive it as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving their goals. For Francis (2006:20), it is the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. In his own contribution, Wallensteen (2002:15) says that conflict requires a disputed incompatibility, that is, two parties striving to acquire at the same time an available set of scarce resources, which can be either material or immaterial.

While the foregoing conceptual exposé on conflict would seem to have captured the various opinions of scholars on the subject, the additional perspective of Hussein and others (1999) is pertinent in this article. Specifically, they are of the view that the concept of conflict could be deployed as an all-encompassing term to cover a wide range of interactions which may include tension between resource users, disagreement between interest groups, and large-scale violence between groups. Against the background of the foregoing, therefore, intra-party conflict would suggest a clash of interests among members of a political party who are struggling over the control of the decision-making machinery of the party and other resources that could confer certain benefits on themselves. In the words of Momodu and Matudi (2013:3), 'it arises when members of the same political party pursue incompatible political goals or try to influence the decision making process of the party to their advantage'. In a similar vein, Muhammad (2008) describes it as conflict between members of a party whereby some members employ certain strategies to hijack the party machineries with the ultimate aim of serving their personal interests.

Specifically, conflicts among members often arise over issues of internal leadership recruitments, the selection of candidates for general elections, the sharing of appointive posts (in the case of the ruling party), among others. To be sure, conflict of interests among members of a political

party, if not well managed within the context of the legal and institutional framework of the party, could escalate into intense competition (for instance, disputants taking uncompromising positions) and eventually, into violence (such as assassination and arson).

## **The terrain of intra-party conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

Perhaps, given the tortuous journey towards democracy and the Fourth Republic in 1999, it would have been expected that political parties had learnt from the errors of the past. Unfortunately, as the case illustration below demonstrates, the terrain of intra-party conflict management did not improve. In the words of Muhammed (2008:11), 'the intra party conflict has remained a predominant feature of partisan politics in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Virtually all major political parties in this republic are afflicted with the virus of internal crisis'. Echoing the position of Muhammed in the year preceding the 2015 general elections, Olorungbemi (2014:248) avers that, 'since the inception of the present democratic rule in 1999, political party organizations were transformed into a battle field characterized by hatred, enmity, victimization and suspicion resulting from bitter struggles among party members in their quest to achieve public and/or personal interests'.

As a matter of fact, no party, in recent times in Nigeria, illustrates the crisis dimension that intra-party conflicts and their poor management have assumed better than the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). It was formed on 6 February 2013 following the merger of the All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressives Change (CPC) and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) (Mazen 2013:1). Prior to this era, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) had dominated the country's political scene – winning presidential elections, controlling both the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as state governments, including various states' Houses of Assembly and Local Government Councils (Basiru 2015:84). The coming of the APC was therefore generally believed to herald a strong

opposition party that would give the ruling PDP strong competition (see Murtala 2013:1).

Indeed, true to this general belief, the APC reversed the dominance of the PDP in subsequent general elections. Specifically, it won the 2015 presidential election by almost 2.6 million votes. In addition, it won the majority of seats in the Senate and the House of Representatives (BBC 2015; Punch 2015a; Punch 2015b). It was not long, however, before it got entangled in a web of internal crises and fissures arising over the sharing of executive positions. For instance, barely a year after its formal recognition by the electoral body, three of its founding leaders, Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau, Chief Tom Ikimi and Chief Annie Okonkwo, left the party, arguing that they felt almost marginalised (Daily Post 2014:1; Premium Times 2014:1).

Specifically, Tomi Ikimi, who had played a major role during merger talks between competing factions, resigned from the party on 26 August 2014, after he had confronted the National leader of the party, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, and his group for imposing what he called 'strange leadership' on the party (Owete 2014:1). To be sure, his resignation was a fall out of the leadership crisis that trailed the National Convention of the party held in Abuja on 13 June 2014. To put the record straight, Chief Ikimi, having lost out in the power game to assume the chairmanship of the party, perhaps felt that he was schemed out by Tinubu and his group. In a lengthy letter addressed to the Chairman of the party, Chief Odigie Oyejun, dated 27 August 2014, he openly accused Tinubu of hijacking the party for his personal aggrandizement. An excerpt from the letter reads:

This reckless and arrogant self-aggrandizement paved the way for the imposition of a strange leadership on the APC in July 2013 when the party obtained registration from INEC [Independent National Electoral Commission]. Those of us who had worked so hard towards the successful merger and creation of the APC were manipulated out of the scheme of things. In the bizarre struggle to seize control of the party we were even openly accused by the self-proclaimed owners of the party, of wanting to steal 'their' party (quoted in Owete 2014:6).

Indeed, not only did these founding leaders leave the party, but their numerous supporters followed suit and left the ruling PDP weakened. Castigating the APC, after joining the PDP, Alhaji Modu Sherriif, another founding leader who played a major role during the merger exercise, was reported to have stated, 'I have taken time to study the package called APC and come to realise that it won't work. And any serious politician who knows his onions would not want to be in a ship that is bound to crash' (quoted in Adebajo 2018:4). Although the party would seem to have succeeded in managing the next threat to its existence – the organisation of the 2014 presidential primary – and even although it assumed the dominance of the country's political terrain in the aftermath of the 2015 general elections, intra-party crises have remained pervasive. These could be discerned in the acrimonious party primaries and congresses across the states in the run-up to the 2019 general elections.

Between 29 May 2015, when many politicians who won elections in March and April of the same year were sworn in, and 30 June 2018, the party conducted gubernatorial primaries in Kogi, Bayelsa, Anambra, Edo and Ondo states. Except in Anambra and Bayelsa states in which the exercises to a reasonable extent were well managed by the national and state leadership of the party, others were so acrimonious that it created schisms at the national level. The 2016 Ondo State gubernatorial primary offers an illustration here. To be sure, the primary, besides generating a 'war-like' atmosphere among the contestants, pitched the party's chairman, Chief Odigie Oyegun, against the national leader of the party, Bola Tinubu. The latter accused the former of manipulating the party's guidelines to favour one of the candidates in order to emerge as the party's flag-bearer in the November 2016 poll (Azikem 2016:1). In a lengthy communiqué, issued through his media office, Tinubu was reported to have accused Oyegun of sabotaging the will of democracy in Ondo state. In his words:

[A]s a party chairman, Oyegun was supposed to protect our internal processes and be an impartial arbiter, a person in whom all had confidence. Instead, he donned the garment of a confident man, duping the NWC [National Working Committee], the party, and INEC in one fell blow. He has robbed APC members in Ondo State of the chance to pick in a fair manner who they believe is the best candidate (quoted in Azikem 2016:6).



In reaction to the allegation levelled against him by Tinubu and the calls for his resignation, the party chairman described the allegations as ‘reckless falsehood’. One of the paragraphs of his rebuttal reads:

This reckless and baseless corruption allegation leveled against me is unfortunate and an insult to my person and my hard-earned reputation which I have strongly maintained. Nobody has the kind of money that can buy my conscience or makes me do injury to an innocent man. In all the primaries conducted under my watch as National Chairman, I have strived to ensure a free, fair, transparent and credible process. The 2016 Ondo State APC Governorship Primary Election was not an exception (Premium Times 2016:1).

In the aftermath of the Ondo State Governorship Primary imbroglio, neither did Oyegun resign as demanded by Tinubu nor did the party go into extinction in Ondo State, but the reverberation of the impasse would seem to have set the stage for future confrontations between the two party leaders. Indeed, barely eighteen months after the Ondo State affair, the personality clash between the two figures came into the open again when Tinubu publicly accused Oyegun of frustrating his efforts at reconciling aggrieved party members across the states (Oladesu 2018:1). In a letter dated 21 February 2018, entitled ‘Actions and conduct weakening the party from within’ and sent to the President, Vice-President, Senate President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tinubu alleges:

Drawing from your behaviour in Kogi, Kaduna and with regard to the state chapter assessment requested, I am led to the inference that you have no intention of actually supporting my assignment. Instead, you apparently seek to undermine my mandate by engaging in dilatory tactics for the most part. When forced to act, you do so in an arbitrary and capricious manner, without the counsel of other NWC members and without regard to our internal procedures. You may have personal qualms with me. That is your right as a human being. However, you have no such right as the chairman of this party. This party belongs to all of its members. You have no greater claim on it than any of the rest of us (The Nation 2018:6).

In his response, Oyegun claimed that he gave full support to Tinubu in the discharge of his duties in resolving the APC crisis (Nwafor 2018:1). Interestingly, the open rifts between the two *dramatis personae* may also have played out during the tenure elongation imbroglio. In line with Article 17(1) and 13.2(B) of the party's constitution and Section 223 of the 1999 Constitution, which limit tenure of elected officers to 4 years, renewable once by election, the tenure of the Oyegun-led National Executive Council (NEC) was to run out on 30 June 2018. However, there arose, in some quarters within the party, a call for tenure extension of the body. The implication of this call is that there would not be a need for a National Convention of the party because the tenure of the current NEC has been extended (see Olagoke 2018).

To be sure, the pro-tenure elongation group justified their contention on the ground that holding a National Convention and congresses a few months before the party primaries across all levels would create chaos, and might affect the electoral fortune of the party in the 2019 general elections. Conversely, the other group insisted that the provisions of the party's constitution, which stipulate periodic elections, must be adhered to so as not to incur the wrath of the electoral body. In the end, however, the position of the latter prevailed, as the party gave it official backing at the caucus meeting held in May 2018. Soonest, true to the fear and predictions of the pro-extension group, except the National Convention of the party held without rancour in Abuja on 23 June 2018, congresses conducted at all levels to elect the party executives, were marred by crisis. In Lagos, for instance, a jurisdiction that many may have expected to be crisis free, due to perceived hegemonic hold of the National leader on the state, there were two parallel congresses (This Day 2016:8).

Indeed, if the map of the country was shaded with a colour to indicate all places where congresses generated into an open rift, there would hardly be an unshaded portion on the map. Interestingly, the rancorous congresses across the country, as predicted, snowballed into the party's primaries to elect the candidates for the 2015 general elections. Although the National Convention of the party produced the incumbent president, Muhammadu

Buhari in a rancour-free atmosphere, the same remark might not be made about other primaries to elect State Governors, members of the National Assembly and members of the State Houses of Assembly (Neme 2018:3; Ebiri 2018:8; Akeregha 2018:3). Centring mainly on the mode of electing candidates, the party was further factionalised. In the majority of States, barring the few in which the earlier party congresses were well managed, there were tussles between the State Governors and those opposed to what they regarded as State Governors' imposition. Very soon, the National Chairman, Comrade Adam Oshiomhole, was caught up in the crises which rocked three States (Abuh 2018:12).

As a matter of fact, the latent conflict came into the open when three Governors, Abdel Aziz Yari, Rochas Okorocha and Ibikunle Amosun of Zamfara, Imo and Ogun States, respectively, accused the National Chairman of being behind the crises in their States. The Governors of Imo and Ogun States were clinically scathing in their attacks of the party chairman. The former of the two claimed that the fortunes of the party, not only in Imo State but also in the South-east, had suffered a reversal under the chairman. His counterpart from Ogun State criticised the chairman for visiting injustice on Ogun by not allowing the wishes of the people to stand (Fabiya et al. 2018:8). Responding to these criticisms within twenty-four hours, the chairman informed the public that the renewed attacks on him were a result of the failure of the governors concerned to foist an undemocratic process on the party (Ebegbulam 2018:1). As regards Governor Okorocha, he stated: '... what I am not able to do for Governor Okorocha is to assist him with the instrument of APC to help him to build a political dynasty' (Alechenu and Akinkuotu 2018:8). What could be gleaned from the foregoing narratives is that the ruling APC, like the PDP, had also been caught in the web of pervasive intra-party conflicts.

### **Implications of pervasive intra-party conflicts**

Pervasive intra-party conflicts as painted in the foregoing paragraphs could have wide-ranging implications for the peace and stability of a society, especially one that is still trying to consolidate democratic governance.

In the first place, they are not only a threat to the party concerned, but also a major source of political instability. Functionally, as remarked earlier, political parties, performing their traditional responsibilities of internal conflict management could be purveyors of political stability in the society. However, political parties that are unable to marshal disagreements within the frameworks of extant rules are not likely to be able to perform functions that could enhance the stability of the polity (Omotola 2010:130). Seen this way, therefore, intra-party squabbles and ‘wars’, as are characteristic of the post-1999 Nigerian politics (Omoruyi 2002:8), have not only institutionalised indiscipline and political vagrancy (Basiru 2015: 92), but have, as the narrative of the APC’s crisis has shown, created an environment for political instability both within and outside the parties. In their insightful study on the internal working of the PDP prior to the 2003 general elections, Amadasu and Amadasu (2003:120) implicate the party as an organisation riddled with internal schisms, brigandage and subterfuge. These pathologies, according to them, do not only weaken the party, but also do not allow for cooperative effort or support needed by the party to develop the economy. However, to draw a conclusion that pervasive intra-party conflicts and their antimonies are trademarks of only the ruling parties would perhaps amount to taking a jaundiced position. Indeed, the intra-party conflicts that rocked the Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), in the run-up to the recently concluded presidential election, offer an illustration here. The conflict centred on the rift between the party’s presidential candidate, Dr Obiageli Ezekwesili and key officials of the party led by the chairman of the party, Alhaji Ganiyu Galadima. The chairman and other key officials of the party did not only direct their numerous members, following Dr Ezekwesili’s withdrawal from the presidential race, to support the APC’s presidential candidate, but also accused Dr Ezekwesili of using the party’s platform to negotiate herself into the position of the country’s finance minister. She was further accused of not consulting with the party before withdrawing from the presidential race on 24 January 2019 (Ugbede 2019a). In her reaction to the party’s allegation, Dr Ezekwesili accused the party and its leadership

of engaging in transactional politics which she detested (Ugbede 2019b). What is inferable from the foregoing illustration is that minor parties may also be caught in the web of pervasive intra-party squabbles.

Beyond being an albatross to societal peace and democratic stability, intractable intra-party conflicts, if not nipped in the bud, could also play out at the horizontal level of intra-governmental relations. Specifically, such conflicts could create unhealthy executive-legislative relations, especially in the spheres of public budgets and appointment ratifications (Aiyede and Isumonah 2002; Aiyede 2005). Theoretically, the executive and the legislative arms of government are meant to be autonomous of each other, but the realities and complexities of modern societies have made their co-operation imperative (Basiru 2014:80). Although conflicts and gridlocks between the two organs are sometimes inevitable, this could be better managed where there is a culture of party discipline and cohesion. Where such is lacking and intra-party conflicts have become so pervasive, executive-legislative gridlocks, when they do occur, are often akin to brinkmanship, if not warfare. As a matter of fact, since the return of Nigeria to democracy in 1999, there have been many documented instances in which legislators and Governors in the same parties, did not only frustrate governance but also attempted to destabilise the social system. The 2004/2005 intra-party crisis in Oyo State's PDP offers an illustration here. While it lasted, it did not only polarise the party into Alhaji Adedibu and Governor Ladoja camps, but also the State's legislature. The zenith of the crisis was when the Governor was illegally impeached by the legislators loyal to Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu on 3 January 2005 (see Ladoja 2018:12).

At another level, the intra-party conflicts had, in many instances, led to the criminalisation of political struggles in which politicians engaged in an assassination spree (Basiru 2015:92). As reported, between 2001 and 2006, many political heavyweights, from all sides of the political spectrum, were felled down by assassins. These include among others Chief Bola Ige, Chief Harry Marshall, Ahmed Pategi, Funso Williams (Olorungbemi 2014:263). Finally, in the course of contestation for power within a party, players may embark on primordial mobilisation which could create further divisions

in the society which in the long run will threaten national stability. The 2002 impeachment crisis in the national government in Nigeria illustrates this clearly. At the height of the intra-party crisis in the PDP in which the President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives were involved, both personalities resorted to ethnic mobilisation in order to outwit each other (see Omotola 2006). By such actions, the ethnic groups of the two personalities, within and outside the House of Representatives, also got involved in the crisis (Fashagba 2010:136–137).

### **Predisposing factors and drivers**

The previous sections of this paper have teased out the implications of intra-party conflicts for society peace and democratic stability. Since such conflicts are pervasive and have permeated the country's body politik, the poser is raised: how are pervasive intra-party conflicts to be explained? To be sure, this calls for the deciphering of the predisposing factors and drivers of intra-party conflicts.

The first thesis that is proposed here is that a weak party system, the incubator of pervasive intra-party conflicts in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, cannot be divorced from the character and content of the democratisation project that was first imposed on Nigeria and other African countries by the colonial authorities during the decolonisation era. The project was further marketed and promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions, as part of the 'political conditionality' packages, during the structural adjustment era (Adetula 2011:10). As argued elsewhere, this factor can be better understood and appreciated if situated within the context of the country's colonial history (Basiru 2015:93). The argument being teased out here is that liberal democracy and all its appurtenances, inclusive of political parties, emerged in Nigeria within a colonial framework. As Basiru (2018:137) remarks, 'liberal democracy and its institutional components, like other Eurocentric social institutions that have become an integral part of Nigeria's socio-economic and political existence, were products of British colonial engineering'. To be sure, with colonial order in place, many functioning traditional democracies in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa were supplanted

by the European-modelled bureaucratic state. What thus emerged, was a model of democracy whose underlying ideologies and values were alien to the players (Parekh 1993). Indeed, when liberal competitive democracy, adapted to the European cultural milieu, superseded pre-colonial traditions in Africa, it took another form. Resultantly, what blossomed in Nigeria and other colonies in Africa, was a democracy that was in content and form markedly different from the one in Europe (Mafeje 2002). Interestingly, by the time party democracy eventually emerged in colonial Nigeria, during the decolonisation phase of its evolution, what emerged were parties that were the complete opposite of parties in Europe – lacking internal discipline and a democratic ethos. The point here is that institutions of liberal democracy, including party politics, exported to Africa/Nigeria did not fit into the African cultural milieu. Putting this in perspective, Finkel and others (2008:15) aver, ‘the adoption of particular institutions (elections, legislatures, universal suffrage, and so on) is ... a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the establishment of democracy’. Deductively, therefore, the pervasive intra-party conflicts that have characterised party politics in the post-1999 era, as those in the previous Republics, are throwbacks of the crises of the liberal democratisation project in Nigeria/Africa.

Closely related to the above is the issue of praetorian hangover. Put differently, consider the effect of long years of military dictatorship on the country’s political firmament and the attendant implications on the nascent democratic project in the country. Prior to 1999, the military, for fifteen years, dominated the country’s politics and while in power, the military wing of the ruling elites became focused on accumulating wealth. By the time the institution exited from politics, some of them, labeled as the ‘political soldiers’, joined some of the newly formed political parties, especially the ruling PDP (Adekanye 2000). Upon joining these parties, their military instincts would seem to have become manifest, and they were unable to acculturate into the new democratic environment. In the words of Omotola (2010:66), ‘the dominance of the retired officials, without a corresponding reorientation of values and sufficient time lag to adjust to civil life, meant they came into the democratic job with a military ethos

and mindset'. The case of the first democratically elected president in the Fourth Republic, General Obasanjo, offers an illustration here. Having been given state pardon by the regime of General Abdulsalam Abubakar in 1998, he joined the PDP, received its presidential ticket and later won the presidential election and was sworn in as president on 29 May 1999. Upon consolidating his hold on power, he began the process of de-democratising and de-institutionalising the party: altering rules, applying intimidation and triggering conflicts of various genres (see Basiru 2015:96; Amadasu and Amadasu 2003:120).

The neo-patrimonial character of the Nigerian state and the politics that it engenders offers another perspective for understanding the causes of pervasive intra-party crises in a democratising Nigeria. The Nigerian petro-state, unlike the taxation-driven states, is not really a productive one but a rentier one that depends on oil rent (Obi 2011:62). Given its central role in the economy and collection of oil rents, coupled with its non-autonomy in relations to the social classes, the Nigerian petro-state, over the years, has become the arena of intra-class struggles in which the triumphant party becomes the dispenser of oil wealth. And given the imperial nature of the country's presidential system, the individual that captures power through the instrumentality of the ruling party becomes the holder of the keys to the country's treasury (see Basiru 2016). This reality may have accounted for the fierce struggles among the key gladiators in PDP – in the run-ups to the 2003, 2007 and 2011 presidential elections – to get the party's presidential ticket to preside over the department of capital accumulation (Okereka 2015:100; Amadasu and Amadasu 2003:120).

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

In liberal jurisdictions, political parties have, over the years, evolved efficient institutional frameworks for dealing with conflicts among their rank and file, to prevent them from escalating into crises. In contrast, Nigeria's political parties, as it has been demonstrated in this article, have not really institutionalised such frameworks. Resultantly, intra-party conflicts, and all genres of antinomies associated with them, have become



ubiquitous in recent times. This article has reflected on these, discussed their implications for societal peace and stability and identified their drivers. As has been revealed through the example of the All Progressive Congress (APC), pervasive intra-party conflicts are not only threats to democratic consolidation but also to social harmony and stability. They may snow-ball into intra-governmental crises and by so doing, affect governance and development. To conclude, the arguments above clearly suggest that intra-party conflicts are rooted in a genre of political practice which makes entrance into public office a surety for easy access to public resources and an avenue to private accumulation of wealth.

On this basis and also as an imperative to chart a way forward, a number of reform measures are suggested. At a more general level, to this end, concerted efforts should be made by concerned agencies in charge of national organisations to acculturalise and re-orientate the political actors, especially the gladiators, towards embracing the age-long meaning of politics – which is service to the community. Indeed, in some jurisdictions with a longer history of democratic practice, democratic politics is seen by politicians as calls to service. Perhaps, that partly explains why electoral games, within and outside political parties, in such climes are played with decorum and civility. Rather unfortunately among the later democratisers, as in the case being examined in this study, democratic politics and its niceties are portrayed as an investment. Such orientations have over the years tended to heighten the premium placed on capturing political power within and outside the political parties. Therefore the conditions, material or otherwise, that make politics and by extension intra-party struggles for power ‘warlike’, should be looked into. Civil society organisations, through a strong and robust advocacy, must ensure that efforts are geared towards reviewing the cost of governance in Nigeria. The aim here is to make public office less attractive, and by so doing, decrease the desperation of the members of the political class to capture power at all cost. Civil society organisations must engage and promote an agenda towards re-engineering politics and governance in Nigeria.

Beyond the foregoing general recommendation, political parties in Nigeria urgently need to re-examine and re-engineer their internal mechanisms for managing conflicts within them. Although there is no doubt that almost all political parties in the country have processes for internal conflict management enshrined in their constitutions, it would appear from existential realities that these institutional frameworks are weak. They, therefore, need to be re-engineered and further strengthened. Further, political parties in Nigeria, especially the most powerful, must work towards strengthening the capacities of local branches in the sphere of conflict resolution. In other words, the extant centralised approach to intra-party resolution of conflicts needs to be replaced by a decentralised approach in which local branches play pivotal roles. Again, political parties should attempt to incorporate non-adversarial conflict management models into their internal conflict management menu. This will help to inculcate a culture of trust and win-win attitudes at all levels within parties.

Finally, the judiciary, usually the next port of call when internal party resolution mechanisms fail to resolve lingering conflicts, needs to be reformed for enhanced electoral justice delivery. To this end, reforms to ensure efficient and speedy dispensation of electoral justice need to be urgently undertaken. Attempts may, for instance, be made by concerned authorities in Nigeria to establish special courts, like election petition tribunals, with jurisdictions over intra-party conflicts. An efficient judicial sector that can deliver justice speedily will contribute to lessening tensions among disputants within parties.

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